

## INTO THE WILD AND BEYOND: A JOURNEY OF CONSERVATION, EXPLORATION, AND STARGAZING IN KODAIKANAL

Mango Education, with a vision to build an ecosystem that contributes to scientific curiosity and technological exploration among students, organized a 3-day Kodaikanal expedition for grade 9 students of Yellow Train School, Coimbatore. In collaboration with Zoo Outreach Organisation, where I am currently interning, I joined the expedition to educate students about wildlife conservation and environmental awareness. Our journey began early in the morning of 10 March 2025, at 5 from Coimbatore.

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The students arrived on a bus arranged by their school, and we met for breakfast, where we introduced ourselves before continuing on our journey. Our first stop was the Shembaganur Museum of Natural History at Kodaikanal, where I conducted a session on wildlife conservation, specimen preservation techniques, evolution and migration, and the behaviour and morphology of birds, butterflies, and moths.





Later, we travelled to Woodstock Farm in Kookal village, known for its breathtaking night skies, ideal for stargazing. In the evening, I organized interactive activities for the students, including an observation game to enhance their attention to detail—an essential skill in conservation and other aspects of life. I also encouraged them to create imaginary animals by combining features of the species they had observed at the museum, reinforcing their memory and creativity. These activities were inspired by my experience in the Ram Hattikudur Advanced Training in Conservation (RHATC) course. I strongly believe that combining science and conservation-based games helps students develop both curiosity and a sense of responsibility toward the environment. Hopefully, these experiences will shape them into future conservationists who strive for ecological balance, where humans, wildlife, and sustainable development coexist harmoniously.

In the evening, Obuli Chandran of Mango Education and his colleague Vignesh conducted an engaging stargazing session. Using telescopes, we observed stars,

planets, galaxies, nebulae, clusters, and celestial events with remarkable clarity, thanks to the pristine night sky. The session fascinated both the students and me, deepening our appreciation for astronomy.



The next morning, the weather had completely transformed—freezing cold, drizzling rain, and strong winds. Despite this, both the students and the team were eager for an adventure. We geared up in raincoats and jackets and embarked on a nature trek through patches of Western Ghats forests and grasslands. Along the way, I explained the impact of invasive plant species—one of the major challenges in conservation and human-wildlife interactions. We also discussed wild animal behaviour and the negative consequences of feeding them, which can lead to habituation and negative interactions with



a fun and thought-provoking way. That night, due to the rain, we had no electricity in the village, but this only brought us closer as we shared stories and enjoyed each other's company.

Early the next morning, at around 4, the skies cleared, revealing a spectacular view. Obuli and Vignesh quickly set up the telescope, allowing us to observe celestial objects. To our delight, we could even see the Milky Way galaxy with the naked eye—a breathtaking sight that left everyone in awe. Despite the bitter cold and strong winds, the students' enthusiasm for space and astronomy was unwavering.

humans. The trek concluded at a beautiful waterfall nestled amidst village farmlands, where we took a moment to admire the scenery before heading back to the camp.

When in the field, adapting the education program based on the weather keeps things exciting even for the trainers. As it was cold and constantly raining we modified our education plan. Obuli led an engaging session with tasks related to the moon, spaceships, and ranking the survival priorities of astronomers until they reach their mothership. The challenge sparked curiosity among the students, encouraging them to apply their knowledge of space science in



After this unforgettable experience, we set off for our next destination—the Kodaikanal Solar Observatory, India's oldest observatory dedicated to solar research. There, we explored their remarkable achievements and gained insight into the vast and ongoing studies of space and celestial phenomena.

# Report

As the expedition came to an end, we bid farewell to the students and returned to Coimbatore. Although this was my first independent experience educating students, it was a deeply enriching one, teaching me valuable lessons about communication, engagement, and conservation education. This journey will remain one of my most cherished memories, as it not only broadened my understanding but also helped me grow into a better version of myself in the field of wildlife conservation.

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